

Remarks by Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge Regarding Recent Threat Reports

Office of the Press Secretary

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Secretary Ridge: Good afternoon, ladies and gentleman. President Bush has told you, and I have reiterated the promise, that when we have specific credible information, that we will share it.

Now this afternoon, we do have new and unusually specific information about where al-Qaeda would like to attack. And as a result, today, the United States Government is raising the threat level to Code Orange for the financial services sector in New York City, Northern New Jersey and Washington, DC.

Since September 11th, 2001, leaders of our commercial financial institutions have demonstrated exceptional leadership in improving its security. However, in light of new intelligence information, we have made the decision to raise the threat level for this sector, in these communities, to bring protective resources to an even higher level.

This will allow us to increase protection in and around those buildings that require it, and also raise awareness for employees, and residents, and customers, and visitors. We know, and we know from experience, that increased physical protection and added vigilance from citizens can thwart a terrorist attack. And that is our goal.

Now this is the first time we have chosen to use the Homeland Security Advisory System in such a targeted way. Compared to previous threat reporting, these intelligence reports have provided a level of detail that is very specific. The quality of this intelligence, based on multiple reporting streams in multiple locations, is rarely seen and it is alarming in both the amount and specificity of the information.

Now while we are providing you with this immediate information, we will also continue to update you as the situation unfolds. As of now, this is what we know: reports indicate that al-Qaeda is targeting several specific buildings, including the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in the District of Columbia; Prudential Financial in Northern New Jersey; and Citigroup buildings and the New York Stock Exchange in New York. Let me assure you; let me reassure you, actions to further strengthen security around these buildings are already underway. Additionally, we're concerned about targets beyond these and are working to get more information about them.

Senior leadership across the Department of Homeland Security, in coordination with the White House, the CIA, the FBI, and other federal agencies, have been in constant contact with the governors, the mayors, and the homeland security advisors of the affected locations I just named.

We have talked with the executive leadership of the companies that own these businesses and operate these buildings – the people who know these facilities best. We have told them that, at this time, there is no information that indicates a specific time for these attacks beyond the period leading up to our national elections.

Of course, just because we know where – but not precisely when – that does not mean that we cannot take pre-emptive action. Just the opposite: when collection activities provide specific information, we can tailor security measures to the particular vulnerabilities of those potential targets.

Now understandably, security measures at each facility will not be uniform in nature, given the scope and the scale of building architecture, access to and from roads and other variables.

Certainly, we will not broadcast our security intentions to our enemies.

But you may expect to see special buffer zones to secure the perimeter of the buildings from unauthorized cars and trucks; restrictions to affected underground parking; security personnel

using identification badges and digital photos to keep track of people entering and exiting buildings; increased law enforcement presence, and even robust screening of vehicles, and packages, and deliveries.

These and other security measures, both seen and unseen, create added layers of protection to an already vigorous security effort around this country. So let me be clear: While we have raised the threat level for the financial services sector in the affected communities, the rest of the nation remains at an elevated, or Code Yellow, risk of terrorist attack.

Rest assured, rest assured that the most talented security professionals and law enforcement professionals around this country are working hard every single day to protect all regions of the country and all sectors of our economy.

Now over the course of the last year, and since the horrific day of 9-11, more permanent protections are in place than ever before. I suspect that many of you have seen them. They have become part of our daily life: additional airport security, including screenings, and air marshals, and hardened cockpit doors. You've seen more visible law enforcement officers on trains, and subways, and other transportation systems. You've seen increased inspections at our nation's ports or at our border crossings.

And this summer, given the volume of symbolic events and large gatherings, we have ramped up protective measures more than ever before. Let me paint a partial picture: thousands of radiological pagers have been given to law enforcement around the country, and more are on their way. At work are more HAZMAT technicians, undercover agents, and emergency response teams, and more K-9 units capable of detecting explosives and weapons of mass destruction. Advanced air monitoring technologies that can check for biological pathogens are operating in key locations.

Now, along with smart security professionals, these technologies helped bring the Democratic National Convention to a safe conclusion. The state-of-the-art equipment like this is now being installed to protect the Republican National Convention in New York later this year. This equipment and added personnel will bolster security measures already being put in place right at Madison Square Garden and throughout the transportation systems in New York City.

These added security measures mean that from curb to the cockpit, at our ports of entry and borders in between; in our public places and cyberspace; on air, and land, and sea...we are better protected than we ever have been before.

We bring you this information today, and, again, will continue to update you if new specific information becomes available. Because with this kind of information comes action.

There is much we can each do to remain vigilant, to be on watch, to be aware of unusual patterns or vehicles, and to report suspicious activities. And so this afternoon, I ask our citizens for their watchful eyes as we continue to monitor this situation.

I certainly realize that this is sobering news, not just about the intent of our enemies, but of their specific plans and a glimpse into their methods.

But we must understand that the kind of information available to us today is the result of the President's leadership in the war against terror. The reports that have led to this alert are the result of offensive intelligence and military operations overseas, as well as strong partnerships with our allies around the world, such as Pakistan. Such operations and partnerships give us insight into the enemy so we can better target our defensive measures here and away from home.

The terrorists should know, in this country, this kind of information, while startling, is not stifling. It will not weaken the American spirit, it will not dampen our resolve, for our resolve is indivisible –

and unyielding – which is a weapon infinitely stronger than the plots and the plans of those who wish to do us harm.

Al-Qaeda wants to intimidate us and prevent us from enjoying our lives and exercising our freedoms. And yet, liberty has no greater protector than the collective will of the American people. So, together let us take inspiration from this strength, and use it to our utmost to keep our great nation safe and free.

Thank you very much.

For additional information, go to the home page of the Department of Homeland Security: <http://www.dhs.gov>